Genesis Stories

1. In the Beginning: Two Stories of Creation

In the beginning, about 3,000 years ago*, Jewish desert dwellers in what is present-day southern Israel told a story around campfires about the creation of the first man and first woman. The story they told, and passed on to generations of future desert dwellers, described a pre-creation scene much like the desert landscape in which they daily struggled for existence. From the dry desert dust the Creator forms a man and breaths life into him, and then places him in a beautiful oasis-like garden, abundant with fruits. The Creator takes a personal interest in this first man, and sets about trying to find him a suitable companion. When none of the creatures He first forms provides the man the comfort He had hoped, the Creator makes the first woman. Everything goes well for a spell, in the story told in the desert, but then the Creator is disobeyed and bad things start to happen.

Four or five centuries later, five-hundred-plus miles to the east in what is most likely present-day Iraq, a remarkable Jewish writer—whose name we do not know—set about the ambitious task of constructing a primary history of his people. Evil Merodach reigned in this dark time of Jewish exile, around 560 B.C., and the writer hoped that his history would help his people endure their many trials. The writer was most likely a priest, and might have been assisted in his work by other priests and scribes. To accomplish his mission, he acquired at least two pre-existing writings on Jewish history. The prior writings came from different places and different times. One set of writings used the Canaanite term, "Elohim," as the name of the creator god. A second set of writings, more ancient than the first, used a Judean term, "YHWH" (translated "Jehovah" in English), to describe its deity.

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Trial Account

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The priest wove the two texts together, trying to avoid repetition and altering them where necessary to avoid blatant inconsistencies. The priest confronted an additional problem: the two texts originally reflected views about two different gods in a time of polytheism, but by the time he compiled his history, belief in a single god had become prevalent among Jews. The priest, therefore, sought to remove passages supporting the polytheism of an earlier age—and, except for a few hints here and there, he succeeded. Finally, he added some writing of his own, or of his priestly contemporaries, that reflected the ideas of his own, more mature, period of Judaism.

The story the writer put together from the various texts is a compelling one. "The greatest story ever told," it is now often called. Without question, it is the most significant history—if that term is appropriate for such a blend of real events and legends—ever written. Some of the events he described are consistent with other historical records, but many others—generally those before the time of Saul and David, or about 1000 B.C.—cannot be tested for accuracy, and are no doubt shaped to reflect the priest's religious and political goals. The history includes dramatic accounts of persecution, escape, exile, sacrifice, and global devastation by a great flood. It tells of a creator god who watches over his people, tests his people, and promises them great things if only they honor his commandments. As any great story must, the history has villains and it has heroes. No figure plays a more heroic and central role in the priest's work than a prophet by the name of Moses, born in Egypt in the 13th century B.C. Remarkably, memory of Moses survived in the writer's people through seven centuries—and was, in fact, the inspiration for the task he gave himself.

The writer believed that his story would not be complete without an explanation of how things–the sun, the earth, the seas—and life–plants, animals, and humans–came to be. For good measure, the writer decided to include two such explanations. He did so even though the two stories contradicted each other on several points.

The priest opened his history with a creation story that might be his own, or one of his priestly contemporaries. The Creator in this story is impersonal, almost force-like. The pre-creation setting is a watery chaos. Creation takes place over six days. He begins by creating the heaven and the earth. Light comes next, followed by land rising from amidst the "gathered together" waters. The creation of living things occupies parts of the next three days. "Grass," "fruit trees," and "herbs" are created on the third day.

- Scopes Trial Satire: Satirical Reports by the Staff of The Onion
- Evolution Controversy: Selected Essays on Eugenics, The Rise of Fundamentalism, the Vatican and Evolution, and the Supreme Court's Treatment of the Evolution Issue
- What is THE Trial of the Century?
- Notes on Inherit the Wind
- A Defense Expert's Impressions of the Scopes Trial
- Reflections--Forty Years After (by John Scopes)
- Hell and the High Schools by T. T. Martin
- Film Footage from the Scopes "Monkey" Trial
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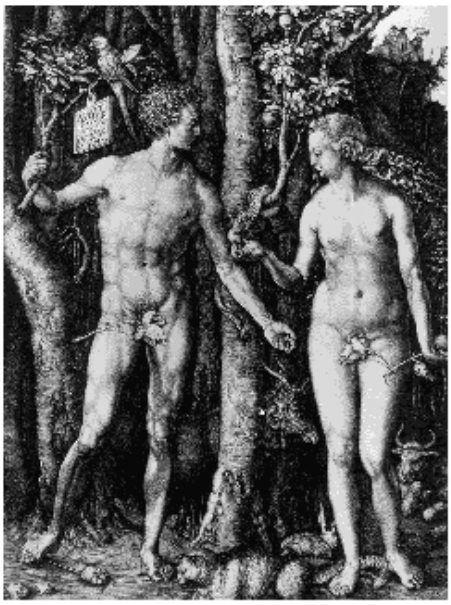
"Grass," "fruit trees," and "herbs" are created on the third day. Curiously, the sun, moon, and stars come into existence the day after the plant kingdom is created. On the fifth day, God brings forth fish, "great whales," and "every winged fowl." Finally, on the sixth day, God creates "cattle, and creeping thing, and beasts of the earth." The creation story culminates with God bringing into existence his crowning creation: man made "in the image of God." Man, the priest explains, is "to have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over the earth, and over every thing that creepeth upon the earth."

Immediately after the first creation account, the priest inserted a second story, a version of the ancient tale that was first told centuries earlier around desert campfires. The deity in this second story is a personal god with human-like emotions, the Lord of the Plantation. The story opens on a barren landscape on which "no shrub of the field had yet appeared". God had not yet "caused it to rain upon the earth." Creation begins in the form "a mist from the earth" that waters the parched plain. God then forms from "the dust of the earth" the first man, Adam, and breathes "into his nostrils the breath of life." Finding a suitable home for Adam is God's next concern. (This God takes a paternalistic interest in the first human, his very special creation.) God "plants" an oasis-like garden in Eden. Proclaiming, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him," God forms "all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air." When none of the beasts proves to be on much comfort to Adam, God takes one of the first man's ribs and makes the first woman, Eve. Adam and Eve anger God by eating a forbidden fruit, but they are nonetheless permitted to have sex and reproduce. From this first union of man and woman, the writer explained, have come all of us.

Later, of course, commentators noted that it was not possible for both creation stories to be literal history, but writing a literal history was never the priest's goal anyway. How could anyone not see the contradictions? Most obviously, the order of creation is different in the two stories. In the six-day creation story, the order of creation is plants, birds and fish, mammals and reptiles, and finally man to reign over all created before him, while in the Adam and Eve story, the creation order is reversed, with man coming first, then plants and animals. The two creation stories also have different narrative rhythms, different settings, and different names for God. In the six-day story, the creation of humanity occurs through a single act and the creator, seeming more cosmic than human-like, is present only through a series of commands. In the Adam and Eve story, on the other hand, man and woman are

created through two separate acts and God is present in a hands-on, intimate way. The pre-creation setting in the six-day story is a watery chaos, while in the Adam and Eve version, the setting before creation is a dry dessert. Finally, in the six-day story, the creator is called "Elohim," while in the other version of events, the creator is "the Lord God" ("Yahweh").



Note

*The statement is not to be taken literally, of course. The universe might be 15 billion years old, the earth 4.5 billion years old, but the creations stories accepted by most Americans have their origins only about 3,000 years ago.

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2. The Creator-God of Moses

In the court of Pharaoh Ramses II, in the thirteenth century B.C., a young child observed the mistreatment of the enslaved Hebrews. The boy's name was Moses, derived from the Egyptian *moser*, meaning "is born." What the boy saw, and what he held within, somehow came together to create one of the great transforming ideas of history. The world-changing idea that the prophet Moses (the biography of whom fills most of Exodus through Deuteronomy) carried to the West was that of a single, all-powerful Creator. Although other creation stories predate those of Genesis, notably the Sumerian "Seven Tablets of Creations" (*Enuma Elish*), these other stories typically described creation by gods—not the one omnipotent deity of Moses, "Yahweh." The name, a transliteration from Hebrew, literally means "He who brings into being." Moses introduced a deity who made it natural to conceive

being. Moses introduced a deity who made it natural to conceive of the Creation as a unified, rational product—something that could scarcely be imagined in a world populated by many gods. (Trading one difficulty, for another, however, Moses caused his fellow monotheists to wrestle, as Christians and Jews today famously do, with the troubling question of evil and suffering. Why would a beneficent, all-powerful Creator tolerate these things in his Creation?)

The novelty of Moses' vision is hard for most Americans to comprehend. Before the time of Moses, most cultures and religions showed relatively little interest in explaining the origins of the cosmos and life on earth. We are conditioned to assume anything that is, once was not—but that assumption was not generally shared in the ancient world. A brief survey of major cultures and religions reveals the paradigm-shattering nature of Yahweh. The early Chinese, for example, seem never to have given the question of creation serious attention at all. Hindus pondered creation, but for them creation seemed less a riddle to be explained than it was a cause for awe. The Vedas, sacred hymns in Sanskrit written between 1500 and 900 B.C., celebrate the radiance of the world made possible by the fragmenting of the original Oneness into thousands of limited forms. Hindus thus reverse western notions of creation: nothingness is not transformed into everything; everything has emerged from a Oneness that was there at the beginning. Taoists, believing in the unity and timelessness of the world's processes, saw no need for a Creator who could make the new. For the Buddha, too, the question of creation was one without answers. Among the fourteen unanswerable questions listed by the Buddha were "Is the universe eternal or not eternal, or both?" and "Is the universe infinite in space or not infinite, or both or neither?" The Buddha, in a commonsense way that has made his philosophy attractive to millions, asked, "What use would it be to have the beginnings of things revealed?" Homeric epics, fashioned orally in Greece sometime after 1000 B.C., showed no signs of interest in how the world came into being. The epics begin with a world populated by fully mature gods and goddesses.

While Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians look primarily inward for the meaning of life, the Creator-God of Moses invites speculation as to the nature of man, salvation, and the beginning and end of time. It is especially in the theology that owes its existence to Moses that the theory of evolution presents serious threat. The most defining belief of the Christian West until the early twentieth century was that of a God who created the earth and humans, and who guided the course of history. What happens to that God when

who guided the course of history. What happens to that God when science produces compelling evidence of a natural process, characterized by contingency and purposelessness, explaining the world's amazing diversity of life? Does that God die, or does He retreat to the gaps of still-unanswered questions?

There is a second transforming aspect of Moses' vision. This capable priest and savvy politician saw man as made "in the image of God." If God is first and foremost a creator, and we are made in his image, are we then not also the possessors of creator-like qualities? Prior to the time of Moses, most people thought of themselves as instruments or playthings of gods. Usually people imagined themselves as victims—as persons incapable of changing the environment that so often seemed to conspire against their hopes. Moses—himself a kind of creator—helped changed this arguably pathetic conception people had of their role in the world.

Pulitizer-Prize winning historian Daniel Boorstein called Moses "a messenger of the new." In his book *The Creators*, Boorstein put Moses front and center in Part One of his "History of the Heroes of the Imagination." The influence of Moses' creation could scarcely be overstated, Boorstein believed. Indeed, he identified it as the source of the scientific theories and hypotheses that would one day come to threaten the very religious concepts he fathered. Without Moses, in other words, Darwin would never have been possible.

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Genesis in the Scopes Trial

Two-thousand-four-hundred-and-eighty-five years (plus or minus a

year or two) after the writing of Genesis, Judge John T. Raulston read to grand jurors and the crowd assembled in the Rhea County Courthouse in Dayton, Tennessee the first thirty-one verses of Chapter One of Genesis. The judge explained that he found it "proper" to "call attention" to the Biblical story of creation because the defendant in the case he had just called, *State vs. John Thomas Scopes*, stood accused of violating a new Tennessee statute, called the Butler Act, that made it a crime "to teach any theory that denies the divine creation of man as taught in the Bible,and to teach instead that man had descended from a lower order of animals."

The Biblical creation story that Judge Raulston read as the historic trial opened came from Chapter 1 of Genesis, as it appeared in the King James translation. The judge does not read the strikingly different creation story found at Genesis 2:4b to 2.25, the "Adam and Eve story." Those inclined toward Biblical literalism are forced to accept only one of the two stories as real history, and must treat the other account as partially fiction—although fiction with a true message. Given the more fanciful nature of the Adam and Eve story, with its creation from rib bone and its walking, talking snakes, the six-day creation story of Genesis 1 has been the obvious candidate for literalists to rally around.

As the trial progressed, it became clear that the contradictions between the two Genesis accounts did not escape the attention of defense attorneys for teacher John Scopes. The defense demanded that the prosecution show which of the two creation stories it is that the Butler Act forbids teachers to "deny." Does a biology instructor risk prosecution, Arthur Garfield Hays wondered aloud, if he or she questions whether the first woman was made from the rib of a man? The impossibility of determining which account of the "divine creation of man as taught in the Bible" could not be "denied" by Tennessee teachers, contended the defense, is a fatal flaw in the law: the law is unconstitutionally vague. Clarence Darrow threw down a challenge: "Tell us the origins of man as shown in the Bible. Is there any human being who can tell us?" Answering his own question, the nation's most famous defense attorney said it is impossible: "There are two conflicting accounts in the first two chapters." Without a clear statement in the law as to what "the story of divine creation" actually is, Darrow contended, Scopes cannot be prosecuted. Tennessee, he drawled, must identify "the chief mogul that can tell us what the Bible means." If the state law provided "you must teach that man was made of the dust" or that "Eve was made of Adam's rib," then at

least the law would be clear," he argued. The law provides no hint which creation story must not be denied. Charges against Scopes, Darrow concludes, must be dropped.

Prosecutor William Jennings Bryan, unsurprisingly, saw none of the defense's problems with the wording of the statute. "The statute is brief and free from ambiguity," he asserted. Judge Raulston sided with Bryan. He denied the defense's motion to quash, on the ground of vagueness, the indictment of Scopes.

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For an essay that explains how a literal interpretation of Genesis led to a growing attack on Darwinism, see:

Putting Evolution on the Defensive: John Nelson Darby, Dwight L. Moody, William B. Riley and the Rise of Fundamentalism in America

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Genesis 1

1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.
5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.
6 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.
7 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.
8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.
9 And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.
10 And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.
11 And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.
12 And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after

his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.
13 And the evening and the morning were the third day.
14 And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:
15 And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.
16 And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.
17 And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,
18 And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.
19 And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.
20 And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.
21 And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.
22 And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.
23 And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.
24 And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.
25 And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.
26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.
27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.
28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.
29 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.
30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and

to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.
31 And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

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Genesis 2

1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.
2 And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.
3 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.
4 These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,
5 And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground.
6 But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.
7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.
8 And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.
9 And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
10 And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads.
11 The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold;
12 And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone.
13 And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia.
14 And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates.
15 And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.
16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:
17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.
18 And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.
19 And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.
20 And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.
21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;
22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.
23 And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.
24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.
25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

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Science's Eve

Dr. Lynn Margulis thinks humans are, essentially, a colony of closely associated bacteria. When she first proposed her theory in *The Origin of Eukaryotic Cells* in 1970, the ideas proved so controversial that they "could not even be discussed at respectable scientific meetings." Today, however, the theory that most scientists rejected out of hand has earned, in the words of biologist Richard Dawkins, "triumphant near-universal acceptance."

The human story, as Margulis first saw it, began about 3.2 billion years ago when the only inhabitants on earth were bacteria. About that time, two primitive species of bacteria, a "mother" bacteria (Bdellavibrio) and a "father" bacteria (Thermoplasma acidophillium) started "exchanging energy" in a stable and dependable way that led to the formation of all subsequent life

forms. This happened when the free-living bacteria took up residence in large "eukaryotic" cells. Confined within the large cells, the bacteria transformed into swarming elliptical membrane-filled bodies called mitochondria. With the formation of mitochondria began the flow of a river of DNA that sweeps through three billion years to include us all.

According to Margulis, each one of the hundred trillion cells in the human body is an enclosed garden of specially tamed and always multiplying bacteria. Not only is every man not an island, in the vision of Margulis, he is in essence a community of communities. The mitochondria perform essential functions, such as allowing chain reactions to occur that are critical to breathing and digestion. As Richard Dawkins notes, "Without our mitochondria, we'd die in a second."

Mitochondria, with their own simple DNA that is not affected by sexual mixing, come from our mothers only. Your mitochondria came exclusively from your mother's mother's mother--and so on, back generation after generation, to the beginning of our species. The culture of mitochondria in the female egg seeds a newborn's body, while whatever mitochondria might be in the sperm are lost with the tail at the time of egg fertilization. The female-only transmission of mitochondria, coupled with its slow rate of genetic mutation, make its DNA ideal for tracing and dating maternal ancestry.

Researchers in the 1980s used computers to analyze samples of DNA drawn from 135 diverse women from all over the globe—Chinese, African tribeswomen, Australian Aborigines, Native Americans, Europeans. The researchers discovered that the family trees of these women all led back to Africa. Remarkably, the analysis demonstrated that genetic differences among the various people within Africa all are twice as great as the differences between all other population groups. This strongly suggests that all the population groups outside Africa are descended from a small band of humans that left Africa—probably about 50,000 to 80,000 years ago. In a sense, we are all Africans.

The ancestral human population that lived in Africa started to split up roughly 150,000 years ago, when the mitochondrial tree makes its first branches within the African continent. The very root of the mitochondrial tree seems to lie in the northwestern Kalahari Desert in southern Africa. The true home of Eve—Mitochondrial Eve—is not a lush Garden of Eden, but a hot African desert. The mitochondrial research matches nicely with recent genetic research using the Y chromosome, transmitted exclusively by

research using the Y chromosome, transmitted exclusively by males, which also points to southern Africa as the home of Adam. Unlike the Genesis version of human origins, however, the Y chromosomal Adam and Mitochondrial Eve that our genetic trees trace back to did not have the planet to themselves—there probably, in fact, were thousands of other humans living at the time. Moreover, other humans had lived and died long before they did. All we know is that these two humans, alone among the population of their time, can claim an unbroken line of sons and daughters that persists to this day.

Biologist E. O. Wilson sees the human story, as revealed by genetic research, as the possible basis for spiritual values. "We need to create a new epic based on the origins of humanity," Wilson asserted, adding: "Homo sapiens have had one hell of a history! And I am speaking of deep history—evolutionary, genetic history—and then, added on to that and interacting with it, the cultural history recorded for the past 10,000 years or so."

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Philo and Origen

During the high renaissance of Greek culture, in the mid-third century B.C., Ptolemy II summoned seventy-two Jewish scholars to Alexandria, Egypt. Their task was to translate Genesis and the other books making up the primary history of the Jewish people, often called simply "The Law," from its original Hebrew into Greek. Never before in history had so massive an exercise in translation from one language to another been attempted.
Impetus for the translation project came from the large Jewish colony in Alexandria, many of whom held important commercial positions in the city. Jews in Alexandria, understandably, wanted the Law read in the synagogues to be in the tongue of the people. They probably recognized another important benefit of a Greek translation: for the first time, the Greek-speaking, non-Jewish world could be introduced to their history and faith.

What happened after the seventy-two scholars reached Alexandria is a subject of debate, but what follows is the somewhat suspect traditional account. The elders arrived bearing a copy of The Law written in letters of gold on rolls of skins. Seven days of banqueting followed the scholars' arrival. At one of the feasts, the king asked the elders difficult questions to test their proficiency. When the week of banquets finally ended, the elders were transported, along with necessary supplies, to the Island of Pharos, where they undertook their work. Seventy-two days later

Pharos, where they undertook their work. Seventy-two days later, the elders completed their translation, called the *Septuagint*, and it was then read to the Jewish community. Alexandria Jews received the new translation with such enthusiasm that (this is where the traditional account becomes most controversial) a solemn curse was placed on anyone who would dare to add to, or subtract from, the translation. Finally, the king expressed his pleasure with the work and ordered that it be preserved with the greatest care.

Preserved with care it was. The translation made in Alexandria As the oldest record, it is generally considered the most authoritative, and the one most closely examined by Biblical scholars. After the death of Jesus, when as the Christian community spread around the Mediterranean, the Septuagint took another name within that growing group of believers: The Old Testament. The text survived, and predates by over a thousand years the earliest extant Hebrew version (916 A.D.) of the primary history.

Some two centuries after scholars produced the *Septuagint*, during a period of Roman indifference to religion in the first century B.C., a brilliant and wealthy Jewish resident of Alexandria, Philo Judaeus (20 B.C.-40 A.D.), read the Greek translation. Philo, whose family had recently moved from Palestine to what had become the cultural center of the Roman Empire, developed a deep knowledge of the sacred text and emerged as the leading spokesman for the several hundred thousand persons who comprised the Jewish community in Alexandria. Philo saw, as none before him had, that the Septuagint held more meaning than appeared on the surface. Drawing both from his knowledge of rationalistic Plato and his understanding of the teachings of Moses described in Greek translation of the primary history, Philo invented theology.

Philo's masterwork, *On Allegory*, explores the deeper messages buried in the Biblical text and transforms Moses from a political and religious leader into a philosopher. Philo, in *On Allegory*, rejected simple and literalistic interpretations of the Bible, including the creation story as told in Genesis 1. "It is quite foolish," Philo wrote, "to think that the world was created in the space of six days or in a space of time at all." Six, as he saw it, represented to Moses (Philo assumed Moses to be the author of Genesis) not a number of days, but "a perfect number" signifying the perfection of God's creation. No one, not even Moses, "could ever give expression in an adequate manner to the beauty of [God's] ideas respecting the creation of the world." So the author of Genesis did the best that he could. Although "it is in the nature of God to create all things simultaneously" the number six is "the

God to create all things simultaneously, the number six is "the most suitable for creation," Philo contended. The reasons for adopting a six-day creation story rather than, say, a five-day or nine-day creation, might seem more compelling to a mathematician than the average Christian today. Philo pointed out that the number six is unique among numbers in that it is equal both to the product of its factors (1x2x3) and to the sum of its factors (1+2+3). He also attached sexual significance to the choice of six, arguing that it is the product of an even (female, he believed) number and an odd (male) number. Seeing a symbolism likely to escape the notice of most, Philo wrote that because creation required "birth from couplings it was necessary that it should be shaped to correspond to the first mixed (odd-even) number which has the characteristics of the male who sows the seed and the female who receives it." One can say what one will about Philo's theory of numbers; the key point is that the Biblical text, as Philo saw it, was just a departure point for exploration of God's purposes. (Most Biblical scholars today believe that the author of Genesis chose a six-day creation because it fit best with the sabbatarian beliefs that had developed in the Jewish community by the time of the Books writing in the sixth-century B.C.)

When Moses wrote that the world was created in six days, Philo argued, he did so to show God's love of order. "The law corresponds to the world," Philo declared, "and the world to the law." Philo believed that creation in fact happened all at once, "not in external action but in thought." God thought, therefore everything is. "The great Moses," Philo explained, "thinking that a thing which has not been created is as alien as possible from everything which is visible before our eyes...has attributed eternity to that which is invisible and discerned only by our intellect." From the simple fact "this world is visible," Philo concluded it "must have been created." Moses wrote the creation story of Genesis, according to Philo, to give us "a very venerable account of God"—a God who modeled the physical universe to reflect the forms first "conceived" in his own unfathomable mind.

When God created the universe, Philo argued, he also created time: "Before the world, time had no existence." So when Moses wrote "In the beginning" he meant, in Philo's view, in the beginning *of time*. God existed *before* the beginning—as did the idea that the universe represents.

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In the early third-century, the rapidly spreading religion of

Christianity still lacked a system of theology that could provide a basis for orthodoxy. Persons claiming to be Christians remained scattered into dozens of sects, each believing it to be the true torchbearer of the faith. Believers debated intensely which writings should be considered canonically scriptural within the Church.

In the midst of this relative chaos, two hundred years after the time of Philo, in the same city of Alexandria, a new theologian, Origen (185 –254 A.D.), offered himself as the first theologian and philosopher of the Christian Church. His goal is to create a form of Christianity palatable to intellectuals, one that at its heart rests on his belief that the Christian faith offers believers "the key to the perfection of the mind."

Entering the debate over the meaning of Genesis, Origen—like Philo before him—challenged the prevailing belief among early Christian fathers that the days of Genesis were literal days. Each of the days of Genesis, Origen asserted, might in fact have been a period of time. Taking a decidedly non-literal reading of Biblical text, he questioned how anyone could read either the six-day creation story or the Adam and Eve story as an actual description of a real event in the physical universe:

For who that has understanding will suppose that the first day, and second and third day, and the evening and the morning existed without a sun, and moon, and stars? And that the first day was, as it were, also without a sky? . . . .And if God is said to walk in paradise in the evening, and Adam is to hide himself under a tree, I do not suppose that anyone doubts that these things figuratively indicate certain mysteries, the history having taken place in appearance and not literally.

Origen theorized that before God created the universe, he created —before the start of time—a group of rational beings which he called *logika*, but which might be thought of today as "souls." These rational beings, Origen suggested, had God-like qualities. With eternity on their hands, they passed time endlessly contemplating divine mysteries. Finally, however, these beings or souls tired of their contemplation and started drifting away from God. Time began. Souls began to have an existence separate and apart from God. The only soul who escaped this fate, Origen argues, was "the soul of Christ" who returned to point the path back to the true function of all souls, all rational beings: contemplation of divine mysteries.

Origen was by any measure a gifted and original thinker. His allegorizing led him to challenge, in addition to literal notions of

allegorizing led him to challenge, in addition to literal notions of Creation, a variety of Christian concepts ranging form Hell to salvation. Though unknown to most Christians today, Origen ranks among the greatest of all Christian theologians—and to some Fundamentalists, the first of a long line of troublesome Christian heretics.

For all his originality, however, Origen could not imagine a world much older than man. The very idea of Earth sitting around waiting for man, the species for whom the world, sun, and stars were so obviously created, likely never occurred to Origen or most of his Christian contemporaries. Origen, despite his belief that the days of Genesis were periods of time, confidently expressed the view that the earth was "very much under" 10,000 years of age.

By the end of Origen's life, the battle lines that would carry all the way into Dayton were already drawn. On one side stood "The School of Alexandria," which included theologians such as Origen. The School of Alexandria favored an allegorical approach to scriptural interpretation and believed that scripture revealed "intellectual truths" rather than historical truths. Literal senses, they believed, should yield to the spiritual sense—the critical thing is that scripture be read with "eyes of faith." On the other side, opposing Origen and the "School of Alexandria," stood "The School of Antioch." The School of Antioch, boasting superior numbers, included those church leaders who insisted that all events described in the Bible actually took place in history. Scripture, to these Christians, meant exactly what it seemed to mean. Sacred writings described reality; they were not merely pregnant with allegorical meaning.

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